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Lyric audibility: In Public

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ABSTRACT

This article offers a close reading of the poem 'In Public' by the American poet John Wieners (1934–2002), and explores how historical gay experience can be signalled poetically. Drawing on sociological accounts of public sex, I detail an erotics of silence and a concomitant erotics of listening. My commentary seeks to examine and extend the threshold of audibility in lyric poetry, finding meaning in absent words and in the marked suppression of sounds that carry social significance. With reference to the poet's notebooks, journals, and public readings, I position 'In Public' as a key moment in his literary development, written during a crucial phase of the struggle for gay liberation. I suggest that if we listen closely to 'In Public' we can hear a passionate lyric resistance to the language of psychiatry and the policing of same-sex desire.

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how we love these sounds for/the words they make.¹ (Chris Goode)

There are words and they govern.² (John Wieners)

Prelude

The classic sociological accounts of public sex between men tend to detail an erotics of silence. As Laud Humphreys wrote in his pioneering study, *Tearoom Trade: Impersonal Sex in Public Places* (1970):

Throughout most homosexual encounters in public restrooms, nothing is spoken. One may spend many hours in these buildings and witness dozens of sexual acts without hearing a word. Of fifty encounters on which I made extensive notes, only fifteen included vocal utterances [...] Two were encounters in which I sought to ease the strain of legitimizing myself as lookout by saying 'You go ahead – I'll watch'.³

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Humphreys, who had worked as a priest in Chicago and was closeted during his research and at the time of its publication, remains a controversial figure. As the passage shows, his position is always at risk of illegitimacy: first among the cruising men, and then within the discipline of social sciences. The line between observation and voyeurism is left unclear in the reconstruction of events. During his fieldwork he had to be convincingly engaged in the general activity of the tearoom, but in his writing he had to maintain the non-involvement proper to the ethnographer. The role he adopted to navigate this dilemma – the ‘watch queen’ – is a fraught position of authority. Though by sounding the alarm he will protect participants from the ‘potentially threatening and uninitiated intruder’, he will himself intrude, turning the almost silent sexual encounters into a prose bristling with awkward intensity.⁴ Without wishing to diminish the importance of *Tearoom Trade* as a work of sociology, I want to insist on its literary qualities. Using the language of scientific observation, Humphreys creates his own vocabulary to describe sex acts and the types of communication that facilitate them. As watch queen he situates himself in impossible arrangements, his view of the toilet, with its mirrors and surfaces, both omniscient and claustrophobic. The reader’s sense of time and duration is suspended. At times he reads like a choreographer. In hardback the English edition looks like a late modernist novel, the dust jacket adorned with black and white graphics based on restroom signs. The paperback features a sepia photograph bordered with garish pink. It could be mistaken for a book of poetry.

Part of the importance of Humphreys’ study comes from the conclusions he draws about the men who visit tearooms. They fit no ‘deviant’ character type: many were married with children, god-fearing respectable community members. In order to establish these details he had to go to extraordinary lengths, and it is here that his methodology sounds most like a work of fiction. Humphreys traced the registration plates of vehicles he saw outside the park restrooms, and then a year later, having disguised his appearance, visited his subjects at home in order to interview them under the pretence of a random health survey. This process is meticulously recorded in the latter part of the book, and provided the excuse for scandal. Early notices of his research drew ire from the *Washington Post*, and his institutional position at Washington University was threatened, leaving the sociology department in uproar. According to legend, Humphreys got into a physical fight with Professor Alvin Gouldner, who opposed the awarding of his doctorate. Even after his degree was conferred, others in the administration argued that Humphreys, by aiding and abetting fellatio, had committed a felony, and his PhD should be revoked. The eventual settlement stipulated that the research had to remain unpublished for at least two years.⁵

This delay meant that *Tearoom Trade* appeared only months after the Stonewall uprising. In the era of militant Gay Liberation – which formed

the subject of Humphreys' only other book, *Out of the Closets: The Sociology of Homosexual Liberation* – studies of queer sex cultures proliferated.⁶ For every location where public sex takes place there are distinct conventions. Moreover, there are different types of 'public' spaces. How does a commercial venue – a bookshop or a club – differ from a park? How is sexuality conditioned by the available environment? How does the law respond to transgressions of heteronormative public conduct? But it is not the purpose of this essay to intervene in the contestation of public sex and the question of legal discourse, political action, and collective memory.⁷

The truth is that like any erotics, the erotics of silence is overdetermined. What it comprises is the act of listening, and listening prioritised until what is inaudible is made audible. At the close of the 1970s, Edward Delph's *The Silent Community: Public Homosexual Encounters* (1978) celebrated what he called 'erotic oases' and 'public erotic work'. His account of sex in parks, bars, baths, cinemas, and the subway system is less academically rigorous than *Tearoom Trade*, less inhibited, more interested in details:

Subway toilets are controlled by a coin-locked door. The lock, and the noise the coins make when deposited, serve as audible warning devices. The tingle near the door sends players into sudden flurries of activity to recover conventional roles.⁸

In a move typical of his style, he goes on to make the important point that the necessity of paying to access this space excludes some men from entering. But he does so with reference to 'poverty wanderers' and then assures us that 'the motivated homosexual always makes sure he has the right change'. This is more like the subversion of the language of Public Service Announcements than the careful delineation of characters we find in Humphreys. Though the community Delph observes is, his title suggests, 'silent', he obsessively details sounds. It is my contention that what is abbreviated as 'silence' articulates something specific to gay historical experience: a form of listening animated by danger and sexual excitement, where the threshold of audibility might contain an exact meaning, inviting and exceeding recovery both at once. Silence is contingent, and the record of its contingency is precarious. As Jay Corzine and Richard Kirby put it in their study of cruising truck stops, in the marvellous syntax of objectivity: 'interaction is characterized by a disruption of the normal flow of information'.⁹

Exposition

The American poet John Wieners (1934–2002) wrote about public sex quite often. His tone is by turns joyful, defiant, guilty, and matter-of-fact, the movement of fantasy and shame in complex arrangement. Occasionally, a public

sexual encounter will be the main focus of a poem, but more often it is an incidental event. To give only three examples:

Blown the fags in Central Park
one after another, after midnight
in the snow; on park benches –
under the Japanese pavilion.¹⁰

8 mins. later, riding on a bus
uptown, my feet frozen, my cock kissed
in the men's room

of the Shea's Buffalo
downtown.¹¹

Don't give nothing for nothing,
yet I blew a guy today
for eight dollars.¹²

Wieners, who was born to working-class Irish Catholic Bostonians, was always drawn to confession. Though other poets of his generation wrote about gay sex – Allen Ginsberg, Frank O'Hara, and to a lesser extent Robert Duncan and Jack Spicer, to name only the more famous – few did so as directly. But there is always some opacity to accompany his explicit writing, slips in the language and points of intensity which imply meaning beyond the particular. Wieners, who loved slang and modern talk, and whose later work is invaded by newspapers and magazines, understood how poetry can wrestle with history, and the risks this might entail. Sometimes your history is no longer understood, or the ways in which you wrote it are denied. For any poet there are words that the reader understands carry great private significance, tested out in speech and tried and retried in poems. Living with a poem and living with poetry sometimes means following these limits: how your sensitivity to language and my sensitivity to language might coincide, or dissolve, or persist. How words continue conditioned by use, how the meanings we make are subject to change, asymmetry, and loss.¹³

In the ironically titled 'In Public', written in a state of enforced chastity, there is only the ghost of sex:

In Public

Promise you wont forget
each time we met
we kept our clothes on
despite obvious intentions
to take them off,
seldom kissed or even slept,
talked to spend desire,
worn exhausted from regret.

Continue our relationship apart
 under surveillance, torture, persecuted
 confinement's theft; no must or sudden blows
 when embodied spirits mingled
 despite fall's knock
 we rode the great divide
 of falsehood, hunger and last year

This is one of the few poems I know by heart. I can remember exactly where I was when I first encountered it, read aloud by a friend at a prisoner benefit event in London eight or nine years ago. I remember ordering a copy of the Black Sparrow *Selected Poems* as soon as I got home. I have discussed this poem with various friends numerous times, heard others read it, have spoken it in silence to myself. Sometimes I believe it to be perfect: that every syllable, every half-rhyme and line break could be explained. Every vowel and consonant could be measured for instruction. The exact contours of feeling could be traced against the rhythm and the sounds the words make. This fantasy – that the poem could give up all of its secrets – is the groundwork of another fantasy: that I would write the essay, or the book, or give the lecture which would explain it all, which exhausted the poem and everything it means to me. So I had to begin this essay with the structure of a feint, to estrange myself from these lines which I feel are so much a part of my internal life. But having dissembled and having confessed, my intentions are modest. I want to offer some remarks about what is audible and what is inaudible in this poem, and provide some context for my interpretation.¹⁴

§

By the time John Wieners wrote 'In Public' in 1968, he had a decade's experience of intermittent incarceration in psychiatric hospitals. He would be institutionalised again in 1969, and at least once more in 1972. The torture and persecution he alludes to in the poem included insulin coma therapy, electro-shock treatment, and the experimental use of barbiturates and sedatives. Thomas S. Szasz, in his contemporary writing on the homosexual as 'model psychiatric scapegoat', cites the chapter of Massachusetts law that justified involuntary hospitalisation. It was reserved for those who conducted themselves 'in a manner which clearly violates the established laws, ordinances, conventions, or morals of the community'.¹⁵ For Wieners, who had no recourse to private property and was living with his parents in Massachusetts in the later 1960s, any 'public' must extend to the state hospitals and prisons of which he and many of his friends had experience. Michael Rumaker's memoir of his time in San Francisco with a literary crowd which included Wieners makes clear the dangers in 1958–1959:

But the Morals Squad was everywhere, and the entrapment of gay males in the streets, the parks, and in numerous public places was a constant fear and common occurrence. Often the most handsome, hung, desirable-looking cops were used for the plainclothes operations. I often wondered who did the selecting.¹⁶

Rumaker reports that Wieners would walk with a cane, swishing it behind him 'to protect himself from Chinese undercover detectives'.¹⁷ The situation was no better in 1968. In New York, John Lindsay's election as mayor in 1965 had initiated a sweeping crackdown targeting gay men and women, trans communities, and sex workers, beginning with Times Square and moving on to Greenwich Village.¹⁸ This policing of gender identity and sexuality lead directly to the riot at Stonewall, which saw drag queens and street kids triumphantly fighting back over two nights in June 1969. In an often-quoted statement Allen Ginsberg noted the change he sensed: 'You know, the guys there were so beautiful – they've lost that wounded look that fags all had ten years ago'.¹⁹ Wieners wasn't there: he was confined to the Central Islip Psychiatric Hospital, where he wrote most of the book published as *Asylum Poems* and began keeping the journal published posthumously as *A New Book from Rome*.²⁰ One of the poems drafted in the latter book closes:

I find this institution wrong.
The patients are half-drugged. They would be
better off dead, and this kind of place
burnt off the face of the earth.²¹

Perhaps we can understand 'In Public' as a harbinger of this rage and dissent.

The opening couplet sounds like a song, remembered lines from Cole Porter or the Gershwins, something sung by stars of screen and stage.²² But Wieners empties the music by a tangle of repetition: 'on' to the 'off' heard in 'obvious'; 'on' in 'intention' back to 'off', like a light switch. The lover is addressed and brought close in memory, the period of restricted intimacy painfully recalled. The wordplay of the first stanza is as intricate as it is blunt: in 'seldom' we hear the 'cell' of the prison and asylum, just as the 'great divide' in the closing lines sounds the grate or grille of visiting hours, inspections, searches. There is no word in this poem which does not struggle with and against the imprint of violence at the hands of the state. In an interview with Charles Shively, Wieners pointedly discusses how in hospital 'an individual sense of particularity is sapped' not only by 'medication or regimentation' but also by the 'identical clothing'.²³ Josh Stanley once pointed out to me for comparison the opening lines of Frank O'Hara's 'À la recherche d'Gertude Stein', where undressing wipes away depression and anxiety, revealing nothing but intimacy and tenderness.²⁴

If only it were so simple for John Wieners, who has learned the desperate value of clothing even as he wishes to be rid of it. What are 'our' clothes in 'In Public'? Though they function as the token of intense sexual longing, the sign

of its incompleteness and the signal of its continuation, these are the garments of appropriation, confinement, and theft.

Robert Duncan once wrote that Wieners had a 'lyrical insistence, a so excellent music, that only being in love would make things sing in this way'.²⁵ That the rhyming of the first stanza, so gentle and slowly shifting through 'met', 'slept', and 'regret', terminates with 'theft' makes me listen closer. I want to suggest that the absent word 'debt' is the point about which what we hear turns. The operation of 'debt' is one of the ordering structures of the poem. At the time of the composition of 'In Public', Wieners was in dispute with his publisher Robert Wilson about the withholding of royalties and the rights to his book *Ace of Pentacles* (1965).²⁶ In addition, at least one of his hospitalisations had been arranged by his family, as he records in the poem 'Untitled':

Ah Dr Cassady I hope you're satisfied
with the \$900 my parents borrowed
from the bank, paid back
but not by me.²⁷

Debt is everywhere in Wieners. Another poem is addressed to 'The Bad Debts in the United States Depts. of the Treasury', who 'took two years of my life away from me, locking me behind bars'.²⁸ A poem from 1973 puts it most forcefully of all:

Poverty has nearly ripped my life off,
kept me in the streets and in boarding houses,
drove me into asylums and maddened drug-addiction
tenements, where I lost my mother and father.²⁹

This debt-relation isn't unique to Wieners but is the experience of his class. In 'In Public', debt is half-concealed and revealed in sound, the language of economic exchange distributed throughout the poem: *forget*, even, take, spend, *confine*, the 'owed' in rode, the 'deed' in embodied, and 'sell' in seldom. The poem encloses a social condition in language, and Wieners writes under the sign and shadow of these terms, in the restraints and confinements of his position. In advance of its own losses, capital distributes debt among the working-class and the impoverished. The poet's relationships 'continue' in this inequity: the mobility of the poor queer has an absolute limit. Unsafe within the family, Wieners is forced into a public in which he is always at risk of being again removed from sight, returned to hospital or prison, torture and subjugation.

In this circuit of economic and political repression, what does it mean to 'talk to spend desire'? And where is poetry among the apparatus and the architecture? In his 1973 essay translated as *The Screwball Asses*, Guy

Hocquenghem employs a similar phrase to admonish his comrades in the Front Homosexuel d'Action Révolutionnaire:

Strange paradox: they can desire almost any body with a dick and an ass (I wish I could) on the condition that it all happens in the shadows, that they fuck without knowing each other, that only machinic organs be involved.

Put the same people in a lit room, as we have just seen, or in a tranquil prairie (not to mention a public park) and they start talking to escape desire, or they look askance at one another, eyeing the only body with which they would like to be alone.³⁰

In the insufferable sociality of patriarchy, is language always a means of denying or displacing desire? Out of the shadows, or the backrooms, or the bars, the sexual public is so much talk. Wieners spends his desire in a currency which is dominated by heterosexuality. The poem, after talking, is a secondary act of sublimation, another product of regret. But for Wieners the suggestion that desire *could* be spent by talking is, I think, at least partly ironic. The function of sound in 'In Public' is not only, as I have implied, to reveal the latent bind of economic relations. Throughout his work, Wieners consistently frames sexual activity with reference to sound and to listening. The first poem in his first book, 'A Poem for Record Players', describes how: 'I find a pillow to/muffle the sounds I make./I am engaged in taking away/from God his sound'. He goes on to state: 'I have you by the ears', a manifestly erotic image, which doubles as the figure of the reader, rapt with attention. The poem is not a sublimation of forbidden and socially unacceptable desire, but its intensification and reiteration. Desire, in the sound-world that Wieners has made and which he holds our ears to listen to, can't be spent, exhausted, or, for that matter, escaped.

But there are unwanted ears. Like the language of economic transaction, 'ears' are hidden throughout 'In Public'. Reading back from the 'ear' in 'year', the last word of the poem, we find particles of the word arranged and re-arranged in 'great', 'relationship', and 'surveillance' itself. Once this is noted, we suspect an 'ear' behind 'our', partly suggested by 'each', and perhaps even buried in 'desire'. Surveillance is enacted in the language the poet uses. The vowels slip and threaten betrayal. These instances bring us close to the threshold of what is audible in the poem, returning us to the question of silence. There is an audio recording of John Wieners reading 'In Public' in March 1968.³¹ His voice is beautiful, a Boston accent which to my English ears is unpredictable and surprising in its emphases and timing. The recording lasts for 55 seconds, and includes a silence seven seconds long when Wieners gets to what I think are the most complicated lines of the poem: 'No must or sudden blows/when embodied spirits mingled'. Wieners is reading what must be an earlier draft, and says, after his long and terrible pause: 'Not mist or sudden blows/when embodied spirits

mingled'.³² I don't know how to interpret these lines. Sometimes I think they sound something like a utopian demand for sexual life, in which intimacy is freed from coercion, and the contrary 'embodied spirits' can mix and exchange without debt. If Whitman calls for adhesive love, perhaps in Wieners we find an alchemical vision.³³ But the 'sudden blows' are from Yeats's 'Leda and the Swan':

A sudden blow: the great wings beating still
Above the staggering girl, her thighs caressed
By the dark webs, her nape caught in his bill,
He holds her helpless breast upon his breast.³⁴

In a way, 'In Public' collapses at this point: the anger peaks with the preceding itemisation of state violence, leaving us with this trace of gratuitously aestheticized literary violence, a rape both absent and present by citation. The 'no' is outweighed by the 'blows': Wieners can't negate what he has summoned.³⁵ But this is further complicated because 'blows' is a crucial part of the vocabulary of his desire. In addition to the samples given above, let us only add 'I blew him like a symphony'.³⁶ We again find a word that, in the context of 'In Public', is both a marker of and a resistance to domination.

What of the spirits? Do they also come by way of Yeats? In a number of other poems, Wieners specifically associates 'spirits' with his poetry and the limits to what we can hear. In 1965 he writes in a journal:

In the communion of spirits that feeds the brain
nourish the spirit we find
a circle of angels or saints
that sing new tunes, without words or voices.
only their mouths are open
we cannot hear them.³⁷

In an earlier journal, in a passage reproduced as his 'Statement on Poetics' in *The New American Poetry* he writes, 'spirits descend and the right word rolls out sharp'.³⁸ So sometimes spirits supply the right word to the poet, but sometimes they go in excess of language, making music without words or voices, which is beyond our hearing. Maria Damon has argued convincingly, with reference to Jack Spicer, that in the emergent queer literary poetry of the 1960s, the words 'angel' and 'saint' stand for gay men.³⁹ Both descriptions of inspiration-by-spirits Wieners records are images of fellatio: 'their mouths are open/we cannot hear them'. The spirits who 'mingled' in 'In Public' present a disruption to the temporality of the poem. The past tense falls apart in the grammar of longing and the confusion of remembered bodies. The events can't be confined to 'last year': the poem discovers the boundaries of desire, the limits imposed from without, taken hold in the substance of language.

This is finally what is inaudible in the poem, and what Wieners makes audible. In the opening line there is a detail which can't be heard. It is the word 'wont'. This is, of course, the word 'won't', with the apostrophe suppressed.⁴⁰ This is a common enough occurrence in Wieners' work. He elsewhere writes 'dont', and so on, though this is the only occasion I can find where he writes 'won't' in this way. He uses two other apostrophes in the poem. So why doesn't John Wieners use an apostrophe in 'won't'? Wieners is intensely sensitive to sound, and ways in which particular sounds might propose different relations within a poem, even coming to determine or dominate the extent of meaning or identification the reader may assume. The word 'won't' is a contraction of 'will not', but it's hard to imagine the opening line read as 'Promise you will not forget'. The best approximation for sense I can think of is the faintly ludicrous 'Promise you shan't forget'. So poetically it has to be 'won't'. The suppression of the apostrophe functions to alert us that the word 'ill', concealed in 'will not', is both forbidden from entering the poem, and inescapably part of the social reality that the poem confronts. The word 'ill' remains silent in surveillance, and is marked by erasure in 'wont'.

The publication in 1968 of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders II retained the definition of homosexuality as a psychopathology, listed at 302.0 as a 'sexual deviation'. Wieners, as I have discussed, directly experienced the persecution that such language could serve. This would be the target of some of the first direct actions undertaken by Gay Liberationists, eventually forcing the revision in DSM-IIIR that concedes 'homosexuality by itself does not constitute a psychiatric disorder'.⁴¹ So if Wieners' 'wont' – that's to say, his habit, his custom, his desire, his *want* – has the defining category of 'ill' imposed upon it, Wieners in his poetic language contests these settlements. He resists the domination and privation of his desires by a poetry which at last makes its own public. In the 1970s Wieners would go on to be directly involved in political organisation and activism with the *Fag Rag* group in Boston. He records the excitement in his extraordinary long poem 'Playboy', written during the 1972 Democratic National Convention:

Just think, going to Miami
 having the warmth of physical bodies beside you,
 gay revolutionist,
 unpinning banners in the kitchen before you leave
 laughing at the poles.
 'Oh this will be easy to carry'.⁴²

Critical writing often sees an absolute break in the kind of poetry Wieners wrote before and after, but I think that lyrics like 'In Public' are indicative of the move to make real the flashes of utopian desire which hold out in

sound against an overwhelmingly oppressive culture. We are involved in the history of language, and the record of social relations that language inscribes and is inscribed by. What I have described in 'In Public' should not be mistaken for either deliberate or unconscious decisions on the part of the poet, strategies or devices to make the political or social dimensions of a poem manifest. It is simply the condition that poetry can sometimes achieve: the sounds this poem makes, even when it doesn't make them, are an articulation of an intense contradiction, pushing back against the language used to defraud, alienate, and suppress the lives and loves of those classes and identities by default exploited in order for power and property-relations to remain intact.

Coda

In his 2007 film *Tearoom*, William E. Jones presents the viewer with an hour of unedited footage made by the Ohio State Police Department in 1962. The film begins with an establishing shot of the toilet, and then descends 15 steps. We know it's 15 steps because we're told this information via an interstitial image of a chalkboard. Two men film the bathroom, and install the camera behind a two-way mirror. The screen goes blank. The film then shows men coming and going, waiting around, having sex, combing their hair, rarely talking. At various points the face of the police officer operating the camera can be seen in dull reflection on the left-hand side of the picture. The men are of different ages, races, class backgrounds. Sometimes money is exchanged. Some wear hats. Some wear sunglasses. Towards the end of the footage two boys appear, briefly, running in and out of the scene. The footage was used to prosecute dozens of men for sodomy. They were sent to Ohio State Penitentiary and Lima State Hospital. The film is silent.⁴³

Boris Eikhenbaum once wrote that silent films aren't really silent.⁴⁴ They require language and verbal interaction of all kinds in order to be performed. More importantly, the viewer has an internal sound-world, internal speech and associations which can't be muted. For Eikhenbaum the viewer is always implicated, is never simply a spectator. In the footage shot by the Ohio State Police Department in 1962 we watch two sets of men trying to keep quiet. The silence is oppressive. How close is the critic to the regime of surveillance? Do we get to choose? The language we use to talk about poetry is often lifted from interrogation: we ask questions, we examine, we observe and follow, gather our evidence, present our case. I don't want to master the poetry of John Wieners, or to replicate in the discourse of literary criticism the invigilation of desire. I reassure myself: the poetry of John Wieners can't be mastered, because the way he uses language is in advance of the critic and we're only ever catching up, listening long after.

In early summer 2010 I travelled to Boston, and almost immediately got spectacularly lost trying to find Joy Street, where Wieners lived for his last three decades. With great confidence I walked something like six miles in the wrong direction. It was warm. A man eventually asked me where I was going and I told him Joy Street. He told me to turn around and walk back the way I'd come, and to keep in the shade. I did as I was told, and sure enough eventually made my pilgrimage. Overcome with confidence, I decided I would take the tram out to Milton, the town where Wieners was born and is buried. It was getting late in the day, and of course I had only the vaguest idea where the cemetery was. I asked some directions, asked some more, and eventually outside the local chapter of the Steelworker's Union I asked a woman which direction the cemetery was. She said 'Pardon me?', I said 'The cemetery?' and she said 'I'm sorry?' and I very politely said: 'I wonder if you could tell me if I'm heading in the direction of the cemetery?' and she said firmly and apologetically: 'I don't know what you're saying. I don't know what that is'. I said 'The cemetery! Where they bury the dead!' and she, in her accent different to my accent, said 'Oh! The cemetery!' and pointed me along my way. I got there and the gates were shut, and I had no idea where in the graveyard his headstone might be. I paid my respects anyway, and walked back the way I'd come. The next day, taking the bus out of the city, I read 'In Public' over and over, trying to work out where I was going.

Notes

1. Chris Goode, 'Gay Twist Varial Disaster Revert', *Chicago Review* 53:1 (2007), 69–70. Reproduced by permission of the author.
2. John Wieners, 'The Lanterns Along the Wall'. All quotations from John Wieners reproduced by kind permission of Raymond Foye, for the Estate of John Wieners.
3. Laud Humphreys, *Tearoom Trade: A Study of Homosexual Encounters in Public Places* (London: Duckworth, 1970), p. 12.
4. Humphreys, p. 131. For an excellent account of the ethical complexities of observation and involvement in the sociology of public sex, see Joseph Styles, 'Outsider/Insider: Researching Gay Baths', *Urban Life*, 8, no. 2 (1979), pp. 135–52.
5. See Peter M. Nardi, 'Reclaiming the Importance of Laud Humphreys' *Tearoom Trade: Impersonal Sex in Public Places*', in William L. Leap (ed.), *Public Sex/Gay Space* (New York: Columbia University, 1999), pp. 23–7. Also John F. Galliher, Wayne Brekhus, and David P. Keys, *Laud Humphreys: Prophet of Homosexuality and Sociology* (Madison: University of Wisconsin, 2006).
6. Humphreys, *Out of the Closets: The Sociology of Homosexual Liberation* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1972).
7. Two very useful books that cover these areas are: Dangerous Bedfellows (ed.), *Policing Public Sex* (Boston, MA: South End Press, 1996), and Pat Califia, *Public Sex: The Culture of Radical Sex* (San Francisco, CA: Cleis Press, 1994). In addition, see José Esteban Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of*

- Queer Futurity* (New York: NYU, 2009) and Phillip Brian Harper, *Private Affairs: Critical Ventures in the Culture of Social Relations* (New York: NYU, 1999). No provisional list of this kind would be complete without mentioning Samuel R. Delany, *Times Square Red, Times Square Blue* (New York: New York University Press, 1999).
8. Edward William Delph, *The Silent Community: Public Homosexual Encounters* (London: Sage, 1978), p. 66.
 9. Jay Corzine and Richard Kirby, 'Cruising the Truckers: Sexual Encounters in a Highway Rest Area', *Urban Life*, 6, no. 2 (1977), pp. 171–92 (p. 173).
 10. 'Memories of You', *Cultural Affairs in Boston: Poetry and Prose, 1956–1985* (Santa Rosa, CA: Black Sparrow, 1988), p. 58.
 11. 'First Poem After Silence Since Thanksgiving', *Selected Poems: 1958–1964* (Santa Rosa, CA: Black Sparrow, 1986), p. 214.
 12. 'The Parking Lot', *Cultural Affairs*, p. 69.
 13. Benjamin Friedlander has argued, with great sensitivity, that Wieners' poetry preserves the chance of misrecognition and mistake, the 'all-important difference between one and another person, preserving thereby the necessity for language'. See *Loss* (Boston, MA: Pressed Wafer, 2003), n.p.
 14. For a very different discussion of audibility, see Keston Sutherland, 'The World and John Wieners', *World Picture*, 7 (2012).
 15. Thomas S. Szasz, *The Manufacture of Madness* (St Albans: Paladin, 1973), p. 272.
 16. Michael Rumaker, *Robert Duncan in San Francisco* (San Francisco, CA: Grey Fox Press, 1996), p. 14.
 17. Rumaker, p. 26.
 18. John D'Emilio, *Sexual Politics, Sexual Communities*, 2nd edn (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago, 1998), p. 206.
 19. Quoted in David Carter, *Stonewall: The Riots that Sparked the Gay Revolution* (New York: St Martin's, 2004), p. 199.
 20. *Asylum Poems* (New York: Angel Hair, 1969); *A New Book from Rome* (Boston, MA: Bootstrap, 2010).
 21. 'Intellect', *A New Book from Rome*, p. 27. The poem is undated, but is probably from the end of July. 'Espionage', in *Asylum Poems* is dated '6.28.69', the day of the Stonewall riot.
 22. According to George Chauncey, Ira Gershwin was the manager of the Lafayette baths in 1916–1917, an important gay meeting-place. Chauncey, *Gay New York* (New York: Better Books, 1994), p. 221.
 23. 'Charley Shively Interviews John Wieners (1973/7)', *Selected Poems*, pp. 293–308 (p. 293).
 24. Frank O'Hara, *Collected Poems* (University of California, 1995), p. 349. See also O'Hara's loving portrait of Wieners, 'A Young Poet', which describes how Wieners is followed by the police and jeered at by thugs. *Collected Poems*, p. 279.
 25. Robert Duncan, 'Taking Away from God His Sound', *The Nation*, 200, no. 22 (May 31 1965), pp. 595–6 (596).
 26. For a biographical overview of Wieners see Andrea Brady, 'Making Use of the Pain: The John Wieners Archives', *Paideuma*, 36, no. 1–2 (2007–2009), pp. 131–79.

27. *Selected Poems*, p. 226. A draft of the poem appears in the 1966 journal collected in *Stars Seen in Person: Selected Journals* (San Francisco, CA: City Lights, 2015), p. 165.
28. *Selected Poems*, p. 186.
29. 'New Beaches', *Cultural Affairs in Boston*, p. 158.
30. Guy Hocquenghem, *The Screwball Asses*, trans. Noura Wedell (Los Angeles, CA: Semiotexte, 2009), p. 9.
31. http://ubumexico.centro.org.mx/sound/dial_a_poem_poets/corpse/Corpse_10_wieners.mp3.
32. I am unaware of whether a manuscript copy of 'In Public' exists. In a good number of recordings, Wieners makes subtle changes to his poems as they are printed when he reads them aloud.
33. Whitman is a frequent referent point for Wieners, as in 'What Happened in the Woods at Rockingham County': 'We loved under the tops of long grass/the sun of your ear in/my eyes/the wind pushed but not/between us/one/in the sharp grass./Calamus, he said'. *Cultural Affairs in Boston*, p. 96. But compare 'Children of the Working Class': 'I am witness/not to Whitman's vision but instead the/poorhouses'. *Selected Poems*, p. 176.
34. *The Collected Poems of W.B. Yeats* (London: Macmillan, 1973), p. 241.
35. In the earlier 'Poem for Painters', he alluded to 'The Second Coming' only to interject: 'Not the second hand of Yeats but/first prints on a cloudy window-pane'. *Selected Poems*, p. 30.
36. 'Act #2', *Selected Poems*, p. 53.
37. *Stars Seen in Person*, p. 112.
38. John Wieners, *707 Scott Street* (Los Angeles, CA: Sun & Moon, 1996), p. 45.
39. Maria Damon, *At the Dark End of the Street: Margins in Contemporary American Poetry* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1993), pp. 167ff.
40. See John Wilkinson, 'Chamber Attitudes', in *The Lyric Touch* (Cambridge: Salt, 2007), pp. 215–250 (220–221) for a discussion of the punctuation of 'In Public'.
41. For a thorough account of the activism around DSM II and DSM III, see Ronald Bayer, *Homosexuality and American Psychiatry: The Politics of Diagnosis* (New York: Basic Books, 1981).
42. 'Playboy', *Cultural Affairs in Boston*, p. 114. Nat Raha's doctoral work on John Wieners, *Fag Rag*, and Queer Political Economy looks set to illuminate a good deal of the contemporary importance of Wieners and his Boston comrades.
43. William E. Jones, *Tearoom* (Los Angeles, CA: 2nd Cannons, 2008).
44. Boris Eikhenbaum, *The Poetics of Cinema*, ed. Richard Taylor (Oxford: RPT, 1982), p. 11.

Disclosure statement

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